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**Unlocking the Talents-in-waiting: Case Study Analysis of Chinese and Indian High-Skilled Migrants in South Australia**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Nations across the world and through time have used skilled migration mechanisms to boost economic growth and workforce competitiveness. However, effectively using these talents from abroad and transforming this collective human capital into valuable social capital is an on-going challenge. This study applies a case study analysis of skilled migrants from China and India in South Australia and finds that there are multiple barriers to the successful integration of skilled migrants. These barriers tend to block the effective utilisation of migrants' skills and reduce the ability to advance social capital in the community. The study concludes by putting forward various policy recommendations to overcome these obstacles and outlines ideas for an effective application of a skilled migrant programme.

**Key words:** Australia, diversity, human capital, multicultural society, skilled migrants, social capital.

## INTRODUCTION

Several countries have a skilled migration system in place to help them either overcome their shortage of skilled labour or to add to the “stock of brain” (Iredale, 2001) in order to improve competitiveness and boost economic growth. However, there are concerns in terms of the fair treatment of high-skilled migrants in the host country (Syed, 2008). For example, ILO (International Labour Organisation) studies indicate that high-skilled migrants often face additional difficulties in obtaining a professional job which is in line with their expectations and are excluded unfairly from the employment selection process, either by design or unknowingly (Syed, 2008). Previous studies conducted in western developed nations (such as Belgium, Germany, Netherlands and Spain) show that more than a third of the high-skilled migrants faced discrimination in obtaining a desired job (e.g. Allasino, Reyneri, Venturini and Zincone, 2004). It is further reported that people immigrating from developing countries where English is not the primary language often face additional hurdles in finding a job befitting their qualifications (Hawthorne, 2005).

The high-skilled migrants from China and India, nonetheless, form an important group in Australia since they now represent the leading source of permanent migration to the country (Lane, 2012). China was the largest source market of migrants in 2011 with 29,547 people, overtaken by India the following year with 29,018 people (Lane, 2012). Skilled migrants constituted about 68% of total migrants in 2011/12 (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2012). Among the total skilled migrants, India and China have a share of 16% and 11% respectively and have lately started to form a significant collective workforce for Australia’s social and economic development<sup>1</sup> (ABS, 2009). South Australia has also recognised the importance of this labour force and considers it a priority to boost economic and social engagements with China and India. The South Australian state government has released detailed strategy documents for these engagements.

High-skilled migrants are important human capital for national development because they enlarge the talent pool and improve the workforce competitiveness. However, there are several barriers limiting the full utilisation of these talents. Problems and difficulties exist

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<sup>1</sup> High-skilled migrants refer to people with higher vocational and/or tertiary educational qualifications. For this article, we focus on “high skilled migrants” from China and India with these backgrounds, but we use “skilled migrants” in the rest of the article in order to simplify this term.

relating to policy issues, organisational concerns and individual capabilities. Applying these overseas talents effectively and transforming this human capital into social capital is a challenge in most societies. After a gap of 20 years, an expert panel in 2005-06 was commissioned by the Australian Federal government to undertake a study of the problems relating to skilled migration in Australia (Hawthorne and To, 2014). The study found that the international students migrating under skilled migration had lower annual salary and job satisfaction as often they had to undertake jobs that did not value their formal qualifications. Some of the primary reasons for them facing these hardships could be attributed to less optimal English proficiency, degrees in subjects with oversupply of manpower, degrees from lower grade institutes, inadequate on-the-job training in the private sector, over qualifications, and limited cultural and linguistic exposure (Hawthorne, 2013; Hawthorne and To, 2014).

In this study we examine the challenges that high-skilled migrants from China and India face during settlement in South Australia. Our focus is in line with the priorities and recommendations in the Australian Federal Government's 'White Paper' entitled 'Australia in the Asian Century' (October 2012). We examine how various policy implications are converted at different levels to foster and take advantage of workforce capabilities with Asian knowledge. In addition, this study progresses academic and policy discourse on this important topic by complementing research conducted in previous instances (such as Hawthorne, 2013; Hawthorne and To, 2014).

The remainder of this paper is organised as follows. The next section reviews the underpinning literature from which the research questions are developed. The third section presents the research methodology and the case profiles. The fourth section illustrates the findings under the key research themes. The final section discusses the outcomes and relevant implications for theory, policy and practices, concluding the article by pointing out further research issues and directions.

### **UNDERPINNING THEORY**

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development defines human capital as '*knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes embodied in individuals that facilitate the creation of personal, social and economic wellbeing*' (Rowley and Redding, 2012). Human capital theory suggests that skills have a key role in employment prospects of international migrants; in other words, highly skilled migrants can bring greater productivity, a wide range of knowledge and skills, and global competitiveness (Massey and Jess, 1995). For example,

evidence shows that skilled migrant workers added up to 3% growth to the Irish GDP between 2003 and 2005 (McDonald, 2007), and skilled migrants increased specialisation in the US economy by enhancing productivity and innovation (Anderson, 2006 as cited in Syed, 2008).

In recent decades, there has been an increasing trend of skilled migration from ‘developing countries’ to ‘developed countries’ (Iredale, 1999). This has generated debate about the issues and challenges skilled migrants face in the international labour market. The discussion on implications for the broader strategies of national development (Papademetriou and Yale-Loehr, 1995 as cited in Syed, 2008), and on internationalisation of professions and professional labour markets (Iredale, 2001) has made significant contributions in contemporary academic and policy research.

To tackle the complex issues regarding effectively using the human capital of skilled migrants, Syed (2008) proposes a three-level factor analysis, namely macro-level factors (i.e. economic context, human capital considerations, legal context and social context), meso-level factors (i.e. meso-organisational factors), and micro-level factors (i.e. individual multiple identities and agency).

Regarding the macro-level factors, a number of barriers have been identified, including neglecting the recognition of foreign qualifications and work experience (Fletcher, 1999), unstable employment opportunities for skilled migrants (Reitz, 2001), and the social-cultural and economic challenges, such as structural change faced by skilled migrants (Bevelander, 1999). As for the organisational factors, the most important problem is an inadequate implementation of the productive diversity policy. Syed and Kramar (2010) claim that despite the official Diversity Works policy in Australia, promoting the business benefits case for cultural diversity, there is evidence of a profound disjunction between the cultural diversity ‘rhetoric’ and the labour market ‘reality’. Most organisations have a problem-specific orientation towards diversity. The practical emphasis is on complying with the minimum possible legal requirements in order to keep on the right side of the law (Syed and Kramar, 2010; Thornton, 2006). As for the individual factors, the key elements are related to the dynamic, complex and intersecting identities, as well as individual circumstances of skilled migrants which may influence their employment experiences and aspirations. The most important issue is their own ability to utilise their own resources and ways to compete and progress in a new environment despite visible influences from barriers presented by the macro- and meso-levels (Syed, 2008). Therefore, this study focuses on these key themes and issues.

One of our concerns is how we can effectively support skilled migrants and transform this collective human capital into valuable social capital in Australia. As Rowley and Redding (2012) suggest, human capital can be seen as embedded in a complex web of social relationships. Social capital can be seen as the features of social life – networks, norms and trust that enable people to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives (Pulman, 1996). It can also be seen as a set of horizontal associations between people, consisting of social networks and associated norms that have an effect on their community, productivity and well-being (Armstrong, 2001). Human capital stimulates the growth of social capital, and in time social capital advances cooperation, trust and innovation, reduces transaction costs and increases the efficiency and prosperity of the society (Rowley and Redding, 2012).

However, the experiences and circumstances for the majority of skilled migrants in industrialised countries, and in Australia in particular, are far from ideal. In reality the added value brought by the majority of skilled migrants to Australia can be seen to be underutilised and, as a result, the transfer from this collective human capital to valuable social capital is rendered fruitless. The following sections will provide more detailed information on skilled migrants in Australia and the problems they are facing.

## **HIGH-SKILLED MIGRATION IN AUSTRALIA**

### **Government Policies**

Migration rules in Australia have gone through various stages of substantive changes in the past two decades. In 1997, the incoming Australian Government made major modifications to the country's skilled migration programme. For example, the English language proficiency test was made mandatory; qualification screening was made more rigorous; and international students studying in Australia were incentivised to migrate. Policy analysts and researchers claim that this had some favourable outcomes. For example, Hawthorne (2005) indicates that the employment rate of skilled migrants improved significantly due to these changes. Research indicates that Australia's skilled migration programme showed some favourable outcomes for migrants from Malaysia and that Asian migrants had just started to experience upward occupational mobility since 1996 (Parr and Guo, 2005; Ziguras and Law, 2006). However, this positive outlook was short-lived, and underutilisation of immigrant skills has more recently become a "topical issue" for policy makers and researchers (Almeida and

Fernando, 2016). This situation happened primarily due to the short-sighted policy of commercialising the education sector by indiscriminately promoting an education export industry and linking education to migration to Australia (Birrell and Healy, 2010; Robertson and Runganaikaloo, 2014; Singh and Cabraal, 2010). In the new policy measures that were introduced, even vocational and educational training (VET) qualifications, such as hair-dressing and cooking, could also secure permanent residency (PR) to a prospective migrant (Birrell and Perry, 2009). Due to these measures, the VET sector saw a rapid growth of 183% in enrolments between 2005 and 2008; whereas enrolments for university degrees saw a meagre 20.7% increase (Birrell and Perry, 2009). The decision to place VET courses (such as hair-dressing or cooking) on the Migration Occupations Demand List (MODL), which provided extra points to a migration applicant, had no scientific basis and took no account of future employability for the migrants (Birrell and Perry, 2009).<sup>2</sup> Even the suitability of communication skills in English for migration purposes was set below the typically desired level in a professional environment in Australia. This resulted in migration of professionals that failed to obtain jobs, either because there was little demand for those jobs or they failed to meet employers' needs (Birrell and Healy, 2008).

To address the above problem, the Labour Government decided in December 2008 to bring about significant alterations to the migration policy over the coming months (Birrell and Healy, 2010; Birrell and Perry, 2009). The government announced in 2009 that migrant applicants sponsored by employers and state governments will be given preference and priority.<sup>3</sup> In 2010, the government introduced a new Critical Skills List (CSL) and scrapped MODL. Furthermore, applicants having requisite points to qualify for migration, but not

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<sup>2</sup> For example, in 2002 only 818 overseas Indian students enrolled for VET courses as compared to 4,359 enrolling for higher degrees in Australian universities (Birrell and Perry, 2009). However, by 2008, 32,771 overseas Indian students enrolled for VET courses as compared to only 12,102 enrolling for higher education (Birrell and Perry, 2009). The primary motivation for the majority of these students was migration to Australia as several of them either had higher degrees obtained in India or the courses that they were enrolled in were worthless in their domestic countries (Birrell and Healy, 2010; Singh and Cabraal, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> This was a significant shift from “supply-driven migration model” to a “hybrid model” that supposedly also considered demand for skilled migrants (van de Ven, Voitchovsky, and Buddelmeyer, 2014). In 2004-05, the number of people migrating under the ‘General Skilled’ category (primarily after meeting a requisite number of points) was more than three times vis-à-vis total number migrating as ‘Employee or State Sponsored’; however, by 2009-10, numbers migrating under the ‘Employee or State Sponsored’ category was almost equal to the ‘General Skilled’ category (Birrell and Healy, 2010).



having their occupation listed in CSL, are informed that they have to wait significantly longer before their application is even considered (Birrell and Healy, 2010).

The new measures taken by the Labour government, however, are not without serious pitfalls. Since the applicants having sponsorship from employers will be given preference, so the balance of power has significantly and unduly shifted in favour of employers, making applicants extremely vulnerable to exploitation (Birrell and Perry, 2009). Similarly, individual states have the right to bestow as many migration visas as they wish (Birrell and Perry, 2009) with no regard to employment demands within the state (King, 2015). This raises concerns as states like Victoria and South Australia have made it clear that they will actively promote overseas migration to boost economic activity in their respective states; hence, in the initial years of this scheme, these states even refused to share data on how many applications they have sponsored for migration (Birrell and Perry, 2009). Furthermore, the logic adopted by these states to designate metropolitan cities like Melbourne and Adelaide as “Designated Areas” for state sponsorship is also counterintuitive, as one would imagine only remote or regional areas to be assigned that category (Birrell and Healy, 2008).

South Australia's unemployment rate currently remains the highest in Australia with a gloomy future due to the pending closure of the car-manufacturing industry in Adelaide's northern suburbs. Under these circumstances, the South Australian State Government has the responsibility to accurately assess and communicate the fit between the migration program and skills needed. This should help paint a realistic picture of the job opportunities and help sculpt the expectations for the incoming migrants. The ongoing mismatching of high-skilled migrants to low-skilled jobs may have a negative impact on employment levels of domestic job applicants as well – particularly for the younger cohort and those without tertiary qualification since they are in direct competition with high-skilled migrants for low-skilled jobs.

Thus far, the mismatch between education, labour and migration is evident in the migration policies of Australia, and is considered to be “risky” by Healy (2009). Not surprisingly, while on the one hand, this has resulted in “anger or frustration with the immigration process and a deep sense of disillusionment and distrust of the government” among skilled migrants, particularly from non-English speaking countries (NESC) (Robertson and Runganaikaloo, 2014), on the other hand support for a reduction in the number of migrants has grown significantly (Betts, 2008; King, 2015). The mistakes made

could have either been easily predicted or addressed more promptly (Singh and Cabraal, 2010).

### **Skilled-migration labour outcomes**

Research has identified several problems related to inferior labour market outcomes for professionals from non-English speaking and developing countries (Birrell and Healy, 2008; Hawthorne, 2005; Junankar, Paul and Yasmeen, 2004). Even after due validation and accreditation from a relevant local professional body, most employers in Australia usually treat foreign qualifications and work experience, particularly from developing countries, as less desirable compared with Australian and other developed countries' qualifications and work experience (Syed, 2008). The skilled immigrants from the two largest source markets, China and India, are experiencing great difficulties in obtaining professional and managerial positions (Birrell and Healy, 2008). Consequently, the participation rate of these Asian migrants in managerial and professional occupations has been far below that of Australian-born nationals (Birrell and Healy, 2008; Parr and Guo, 2005).

Elaborating on the seriousness of the issue relating to low employability of migrants from NESC, Birrell and Healy (2008) state that the issue is particularly serious for those born in China and South Asian countries like India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Birrell and Healy (2008) further highlight the bias of employers against NSEC migrants. They state that an Australian qualification even in skills listed on the CSL (such as IT, Accounting or Medicine) result in poor employability outcomes for Chinese and Indian migrants. They state that older and experienced Chinese and Indian migrants (i.e. 30-64 years) having overseas qualifications do marginally better in terms of professional employment vis-à-vis younger migrants having an Australian degree. This also calls into questions "whether Australian training actually bestows an advantage in the Australian labour market as is assumed under current DIAC [Department of Immigration and Citizenship] selection policy" (Birrell and Healy, 2008).

Although the national statistics are not able to provide us a complete and detailed picture on data relating to the visa categories of people born overseas (Birrell and Healy, 2008), we know that 35% of skilled migrants are native English speakers and almost 60% speak English well to very well (ABS, 2011). The data also shows that 79% of the skilled visa holders, who were primary applicants, had obtained at least a Diploma or Bachelor's

degree before arrival and that only 64% of them were employed at the appropriate level (ABS, 2013a/b).

Birrell and Healy (2008) mention that only a minority of the NESC born group that hold a degree are able to obtain a professional job or a managerial position – 22% success for those in the 20-29 years age group and 36% for the 30-64 years age group. It is also to be noted that approximately 21.4% of skilled migrants having marginal attachment (i.e. temporarily unemployed) to the labour force<sup>4</sup> were born overseas in a non-English speaking country (ABS, 2013). Among these skilled migrants, the majority had an Asian background (Birrell and Healy, 2008). In fact, the ABS (2013) data shows that of the total migrants born overseas, only 8.58% come from non-English speaking Asian countries, but they account for most of the 21.4% of skilled migrants that have marginal attachment to the labour force in Australia (ABS, 2013). These are definitely concerning trends.

Ensuring a greater labour participation for all skilled migrants is of interest to all stakeholders and in the next section we discuss some of the challenges that skilled migrants may face.

### **Barriers to successful migration**

The lack of recognition of foreign qualifications and work experience to be at par with Australian qualification, even after due evaluation and accreditation by the local accrediting body, is a major obstacle for skilled migrants. Employers are often unwilling to recognise foreign qualifications (particularly those obtained in a developing country) as being on a par with local qualifications obtained in a developed nation (Benson-Rea and Rawlinson, 2003). This comes from the notion that skilled migrants, particularly coming from non-English speaking countries, are considered to be less productive and more demanding on organisational resources (e.g. in-house training or training in organisational culture). The skills (particularly soft-skills), work experience and local knowledge cannot swiftly or entirely be transferred and converted easily since the migrants come from different contexts (Syed, 2008). Nonetheless, despite some shortcomings on the part of NESC skilled migrants, impartial behaviour on the part of employers in selecting a suitable candidate is questionable

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<sup>4</sup> Persons not in the labour force were considered to be marginally attached to the labour force if they:

- Wanted to work and were actively looking for work (but, unlike unemployed people, were not available to start work in the reference week); or
- Wanted to work and were not actively looking for work but were available to start work within four weeks.

for two reasons: a) migrants from main-English speaking countries (MESC), who are equally ignorant about local knowledge, fare much better in acquiring professional and managerial jobs vis-à-vis migrants from NESC background; and b) Australian-born cohort of students with no work experience are ahead of student migrants from NESC backgrounds as far as professional employability is concerned (Birrell and Healy, 2008).

The lack of specific laws to implement equal opportunities for culturally diverse employees, work experiences and perspectives on skilled migrants remain generally neglected at the meso-organisational level (Syed, 2008). In fact, equal employment opportunity legislation in Australia is narrow with a focus on improving women's participation in the workforce but with less emphasis on cultural diversity. This means that the implementation of cultural diversity management in the workplace remains a low priority (Bourke, 2004). Further criticism has developed towards anti-discrimination legislation in Australia as being passive and representing a system that is driven by complaints instead of proactive eradication of discrimination in the workplace and society (Thornton, 2006). Industry associations consider the current skilled migration programme as being inflexible, too narrowly focused and failing to provide certainty for businesses (Loussikian, 2014).

It is recommended that skilled migrants actively improve their soft skills and familiarise themselves with the local culture. This does not mean they have to neglect and disguise their own cultural values and norms. Instead, these differences could be embraced by employers since these skilled migrants can provide a new and fresh look to the organisation. Local government and NGOs could provide assistance for skilled migrants in learning local cultural norms and new 'country specific' soft skills. Employers should be informed about the benefits of diversity in their workforce for their specific organisations and society in general. In order to encourage employers to embrace the engagement of a skilled migrant as a policy in their organisation and see past the initial results, incentives to employ and train skilled migrants could be provided where necessary. However, this does not seem to be a priority in Australia. Scholars have criticised organisations in Australia for typically being characterised by an inadequate implementation of the productive diversity policy (Syed and Kramar, 2010). One of the consequences of this is 'circular migration', whereby skilled migrants choose to return to their home country after several years and present a loss of investment and leakage of knowledge (Hugo, 2008).

The skilled migrants are not only confronted by a contracting South Australian economy but also encounter ‘prejudice’ based on cultural background and ethnicity (Khatutsky, Wiener and Anderson, 2010). For example, evidence from the health care industry in Australia shows that immigrant workers continue to feel marginalised, because they felt undermined in their professional roles and seen as being ‘other’ on the basis of identity, ethnicity and experience (Omeri and Atkins, 2002; Goel and Penman, 2015). Employers may perceive higher costs or risks in recruiting migrant workers as they may require additional supervision, support or training to address various cultural or language barriers (Priester and Reinardy, 2003). The non-recognition of professional capabilities and educational qualifications further impede their career developments (de Castro, Fujishiro, Sweitzer, Oliva, 2006; Goel and Penman, 2015; Omeri and Atkins, 2002). Previous research suggests to support skilled migrants to overcome barriers by diversity training, establishing appreciation of their contributions to multicultural work settings and enhancing the “cultural competence” of employers (Lambert & Myers, 1999, Goel and Penman, 2015; Priester and Reinardy, 2003; Omeri and Atkins, 2002)

The lack of local experience (61%) and local contacts/networks (28%) are reported to be one of the key factors that prevent skilled migrants from obtaining a professional job (ABS, 2013a/b). Newly arrived skilled migrants obviously do not possess these local experiences or network requirements, and this fact forms a major obstacle to securing employment. Both public and private sectors could support migrants in gaining initial local experience. However, only 8% of total skilled migrants report that they received help from Centrelink or a local job network agency (ABS, 2013a/b). This shows that there is clear scope for the improvement of the skilled migration programme at the local level to support skilled migrants to be part of the community and contribute meaningfully.

The present study uses an ethnographic approach to investigate the challenges confronting skilled migrants from China and India in South Australia at the local level. This approach allows us to focus on an in-depth understanding of the perceptions of the high skilled migrants. The literature review, industry reports and anecdotal evidence helped us to propose the following key research questions:

Q.1. What are the personal experiences of skilled migrants from China and India in their professional job search in South Australia?

Q.2. How do these skilled migrants interpret organisational (employer) attitude towards them?

Q.3. How do skilled migrants perceive the role of various government institutions towards them?

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

A qualitative research method was deemed suitable to develop a better understanding of the perception of skilled migrants from China and India of their experience relating to the migration process (institutional perspective) and their experience in finding suitable employment in South Australia. Motivated by the objective of the research to generate rich qualitative data, a purposive sampling technique was considered to be appropriate (Teddlie and Fu, 2007). Limited time and resources notwithstanding, the intention was to interview a diverse set of skilled migrants, which is comprised of: 1) Chinese skilled migrants having a professional or a managerial job; 2) Chinese skilled migrants not having a professional or a managerial job; 3) Indian skilled migrants having a professional or a managerial job; and 4) Indian skilled migrants not having a professional or a managerial job. Interviewing people from each of these categories gave representation to each of the contrasting groups that were either happy or dissatisfied with their professional outcomes; this was intended to result in a diverse and a more enriching viewpoint.

We conducted in-depth interviews with 24 high-skilled migrants from China and India in South Australia from May to October 2014. After about 20 interviews the new insights from the interviewees were of significantly marginal importance and indicated saturation (Palnikas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, and Hoagwood, 2013). The interviews were semi-structured, with 14 respondents from India and 10 from China. They were either approached directly by using local community networks or were recommended by members of local Chinese and Indian associations (such as South Australia India Business Council or South Australia China Business Council). This method of recruiting volunteers for the study was justified given the sensitive nature of the study which allowed for people to discuss personal experiences based on trust generated by these association referrals. The initial members who volunteered to participate were also requested to further introduce some of their friends and colleagues from the community, leading to a snowball effect. Although we used the snowball technique, care was taken that skilled migrants having positive and negative professional outcomes were represented adequately. The sample included 10 skilled migrants who

reported positive outcomes having obtained an employment in their professional field (including those who reported partially positive outcome either due to significantly delayed outcome or due to casual or part-time nature of job in their professional area) and 14 who reported dissatisfied results.<sup>5</sup> All the respondents were in the age group of 25-45 years at the time they received the right to work in Australia. Other demographic details of the respondents are listed in Tables 1 and 2.

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**Insert Tables 1 & 2 here**  
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The interview questions were designed based on the following parts. The first part is about their personal background, including age upon receiving the right to work in Australia, highest attained educational qualification in their home country and in Australia, English language score, visa type when they first came, and current job/profession or whether they were still searching for a job. The second part is about their reasons for coming to Australia and their expectations. We further asked about their job searching experience, perceived barriers, how they obtained a job and who helped them. We were also interested in their preparation for their job search and the efforts they had made. The third part is about their organisational experience during employment. The final part is about policy factors that they perceived as likely to most influence their successful integration into the Australian workplace.

During the interview process, we followed a focused interviewing technique whereby the interviewer retained a degree of flexibility to divert from the prepared interview guide in order to engage respondents in a particular issue that had come up during discussion. Notes were taken during the interview. The method of data analysis was exploratory in nature and

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<sup>5</sup> Although the desired groups are represented in our research design, they may not be in the true proportion currently present in the population. In fact, as highlighted by Birrell and Healy (2008), the limitation of the available data in Australia makes it challenging to define the population and thus impossible to ascertain whether the chosen sample is a truly representative sample or not. There are also problems relating to keeping track of inter-state migration with respect to various visa categories (Golebiowska and Carson, 2009). Broadly speaking, however, our sample reflects Birrell and Healy's (2008) deductions that a vast majority of NESC skilled migrants are unsuccessful in obtaining professional or managerial positions. Additionally, as discussed, the objective of the study does not necessitate proportional representation and the outcome is not influenced by it.

open ended. The content was managed and analysed using NVivo™ 10. The software helps in coding the data in a structured manner and in organising, extracting and clustering data sets and codes, which helps in theory building (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

## **FINDINGS**

The findings can be categorised into three main themes, namely: 1) Personal experience of the skilled migrants (micro-level); 2) Organisational experience of the skilled migrants (meso-level); and 3) Institutional (government/policy) experience of the skilled migrants (macro-level).

### **Personal experience**

#### ***Personal background and expectations***

The skilled migrants from China and India note that they decided to migrate to Australia in search of a better life, living standards and social amenities, in particular to benefit their family and children. Many of them within the Indian group (I1, I2, I3, I10 and I14) and within the Chinese group (C1, C2, C6 and C7) considered Australia as their top destination – in some cases as the ‘only’ destination for migration because of friends or family living in that country. The ease of migration, based on points required to qualify for migration and time taken for migration assessment, compared to migrating to other developed nations (such as the UK, USA and Canada) motivated them to choose Australia (as mentioned by I5, I6, I4 and I8).

Most of the skilled migrants used the services of migration agents based in their home countries. The majority of these migration agents were not qualified to advise skilled migrants as they themselves had no knowledge and experience of living in Australia (as stated by I5, I6 and I10), but some respondents were still happy with the advice and service they received from their respective consultants (such as I2).

Often a rosy picture of their career prospects and living standards in Australia were presented. However, some migrants felt that this was misleading. Migrants who had friends or relatives living in Australia (such as I1, I2, I3, I10 and I14) had a better understanding of the difficulties in obtaining a job. Likewise, skilled migrants who applied for their migration onshore and/or had experience of living in Australia had the best understanding of what their



life would be after they received a positive outcome from their migration application (such as C9, C10, I7 and I11).

Most of the interviewees mentioned that they were prepared to wait for four to six months to obtain a sought after position. Their expectations were influenced by the assessment of their past qualifications and work experience by the accreditation body in their field in Australia. The accreditation body typically lowered the migrants' expectations because their work experience and overseas qualifications were often devalued.

The experienced skilled migrants were often deemed fit to take up a job in their profession or industry that was only a few levels lower than the position they occupied prior to migrating to Australia. However, the majority of the interviewees were disappointed with the employment process and were unsuccessful in securing a job in their profession (such as C1, C2, C3, C4, I3, I5, I8, I10 and I11). Those who were successful only managed to secure their chosen jobs with great difficulty and often had to accept a low-ranking position (such as C5, C7, I1, I6, I10 and I14). The positions offered were at a much lower level than expected by the migrants based on the assessment performed by the accreditation body, and this caused great disappointment and distress.

### ***Personal career expectations vs. reality***

Further probing provided insights into the reasons identified by the migrants for much lower employment outcomes vis-à-vis their expectations. The majority of the migrants pointed out that their employers were not enthusiastic about employing them. The reason being that the employers neither valued their overseas qualifications and/or work experience, nor did they appreciate or honour the assessment done by the accreditation bodies in Australia (as mentioned by C2, C3, C4, C5, C8, I2, I3, I4, I5, I7, I8, I10 and I11). The migrants stated that despite their willingness to decrease their expectations for a lower level position, they still encountered resistance. According to the migrants, one of the most often cited reasons given by the employers for skilled migrants' exclusions from the labour force was their lack of local experience (as reported by C4, C5, C7, I2, I3, I4, I5, I7, I8, I10, I11 and I14). This employment requirement obviously places a major constraint on employing talents from abroad and blocks migrants from attaining local experience and building local networks in the first place.

The interviewees further noted that networking was essential to obtain a professional job in Australia and they felt disadvantaged due to a lack of local network connections. They further indicated that the local migrant community (i.e. migrants from their own country) was not in a position to offer them any useful network opportunities that would assist them in finding a professional job as the majority of them had either failed in their attempt to gain a suitable professional job or did not have much say in the organisation in which they worked (as stated by C1, C2, C4, C5, I2, I3, I5, I7, I8, I9, I10, I11, I12 and I14).

The interviewees further indicated that they were deemed ‘overqualified’ for positions advertised which were in line or just below the level of assessment of their local accreditation body (as informed by I2, I3, I7, I8, I10 and I11). The migrants expressed their frustration with this situation, in particular after accepting a devaluation of their qualifications and work experience by the accreditation body. This shows that there is a disconnect between the assessment performed by the accreditation bodies and how this assessment is perceived by the employers. Furthermore, the accreditation bodies are unwilling to take measures to rectify the situation. For example, one of the skilled migrants (I2) reported that out of frustration he approached the local accreditation body to lodge a protest about the assessment provided and the negative responses that he had been receiving for job applications. The individual was not given any hearing and was merely told that his application had been reviewed by another state chapter of the accreditation body, so it was not their responsibility to provide him with any response. In recounting this experience, the migrant expressed his view that the response was not worthy or justifiable because he was appealing to one and the same organisation, albeit that a different office had assessed his degree.

The migrants reported that communication styles and cultural issues were perceived as some of the reasons for the exclusion of migrants from the labour force as they believed that employers prefer locals with an ‘easier’ cultural fit (as conveyed by C1, C2, C7, C8, I2, I3, I8, I10, I11 and I14). It appears that migrants are expected to make efforts to adapt to the local environment, however, the extent and time needed for this adaptation varies between people, cultures and countries. It should then be a collective responsibility of various public and private organisations to be receptive to newcomers and implement measures that will actively support the skilled migrant programme on a local level.

### ***Experience of successful skilled migrants***

The skilled migrants that managed to secure professional employment indicated that they felt welcome and received sufficient support from their colleagues. While they attributed their success to ‘luck’, they shared in the interviews some of the strategies that they thought helped them obtain a professional job. The majority of these skilled migrants either had a highly technical background (C9, I12 and I13) or were successful because of community networking (C10, I9 and I10).

The local networks provided opportunities in terms of volunteering for various associations (such as Red Cross Blood Donation camps or Rotary clubs). One professional couple (I13 and I12) used to be part of a religious group and they received support from the other members. The couple also actively approached HR consultants, applied for jobs online, practised cold-calling and followed up on each occasion. They kept a positive frame of mind and were not disheartened by negative responses; they always displayed professionalism when approaching people. The migrant couple further indicated that they dressed formally during meetings, took along a professionally designed CV, including personalised business cards, and maintained a persistent attitude. They took interest in learning more about the local culture and made efforts to understand local sports, such as rugby or Australian League Football to bond with locals. This approach was continued once they found a job. For example, at work they attended and organised social gatherings, and informed the locals about their own culture (I1, I13 and I12). However, this tactic is not failsafe since other migrants report taking the same active approach without achieving similar results (I10 and I14).

The skilled migrants that were successful in obtaining a professional job often have high qualifications with special skills and/or have a strong technological background. They commonly obtained a professional job through a formal job hunting process. For example, interviewee C9 was awarded a PhD degree in environmental engineering and managed to secure a professional job soon after completing her degree.

### **Organisational experience**

The interviewees reported different organisational experiences. Those who found employment in an unskilled job were less positive about their experiences in the organisation. Some of them reported that they were not given a fair chance to develop their career. For example, two migrants (I7 and I8) working at a grocery retail store reported that their line managers were aware of their professional background yet discouraged them from applying

for higher ranked positions in the company. The migrants reported that they had difficulties receiving recommendations or reference letters from their line manager and felt excluded from attending development training sessions organised by the company. In particular, those in unskilled labour positions in small companies had no or little chance for any training that may potentially help them in future employment in their own professional stream (such as I3, I5, I6 and I11).

The experience of skilled migrants who were successful in obtaining a professional job was different. They mentioned that they were given equal opportunities for career development and that their services were valued by their employers (as conveyed by C5, C7, C9, C10, I1, I9, I12 and I13). While their employers did not organise any training customised for skilled migrants, they were satisfied with the working environment (as stated by C7, C9, C10, I9 and I12).

Several skilled migrants who were able to secure a 'white-collar' job indicated that the position did not live up to their expectations. For example, one migrant indicated that she should have been working as a bank manager but was only able to secure a part-time job as a teller. It was felt that this mismatch was often caused by an inappropriate assessment by the professional industry association. Despite their disappointment, the migrants did not harbour any negative feelings towards the organisation or community. However, a number of migrants worried that this mismatch would compromise their chances of developing their career or finding a job that involved a significant jump from their current one (as mentioned by I3, I6, I10, I14 and I11).

### **Institutional experience**

#### ***Policy failure***

A number of skilled migrants mentioned that at the time of applying to migrate to Australia they were inspired by the prospect of a growing labour force demand in their professional categories in country. Their enthusiasm was based on updated statistics released periodically by the Australian government on the requirement of skilled migrants for a particular professional category. However, the reality was different, in particular with regard to the job market in South Australia (as stated by C4, I2, I3, I5, I6, I7, I8, I10 and I11). Relatively very few jobs are advertised, and most often skilled migrants are rejected on the pretext of over-qualification or the availability of a person with local experience, as told by C4: '*People in*

*Adelaide are very conservative. They don't want to use new migrants. The Centrelink (the local government job agent) recommended local people to local employers, but they don't stay in the job longer. However, we want to stay longer, but employers don't want us'.*

This raises questions in terms of the local job market capacity and capability to absorb skilled migrants. From the current discussion it appears that the state government and local job agencies are not in tune with federal migrant policies. At present the local job market does not provide actual opportunities for skilled migrants. The federal government forecasts and policies seem to be out of line with reality and paint an unrealistically rosy picture for skilled migrants. More detailed information, greater leverage and support for public and private organisations at the local level is needed to match the skilled migrant supply with local demands.

Many skilled migrants who immigrated to South Australia came under visa categories that were directly sponsored by the State. They were then obliged to work in South Australia for a minimum period of two years, and thus make a contribution to the local economy and community. These skilled migrants reported that they faced similar hurdles to other general skilled migrants; prospects were no better even in their case.

In fact, they pointed out that the local administration provided little to no support to assist unemployed skilled migrants obtain a professional job consistent with their standing (as reported by C1, C2, I2, I3, I5 and I10). Left with little opportunities, the skilled migrants accepted positions that were often unrelated to their professional qualifications on the basis of which the State government had sponsored them for migration. This mismatch often had a significant impact on the skilled migrant's self-esteem and motivation. The potential consequences of the primary breadwinner in a family having low self-esteem, combined with poor employment prospects, might negatively affect the rest of the family.

Skilled migrants (such as C1, I2, I3, I9, I10, I11, I12 and I13) informed that help was available from local education providers (i.e. Technical and Further Education South Australia – TAFE SA) to educate skilled migrants on drafting a cover-letter, writing a CV and preparing for job interviews. They found this to be useful as it improved their skills in applying for jobs; however, they were not able to capitalise on the benefits as there was little support for actual job hunting and networking. For example, the local Centrelink offices did direct them to a few recruiters, but they never received any useful advice or any encouraging response from local HR consultants (as reported by C1, C3, C6, I2, I3, I10, I11 and I14).

National statistics also indicate that local job agents like Centrelink have a relatively small impact on assisting skilled migrants in securing employment (ABS, 2013 a/b).

One skilled migrant (I6) indicated that the ‘meet and greet’ scheme was helpful. This initiative by the state government was introduced to assist migrants and their families. They were received at the airport, introduced to the local community and provided with fully-furnished rented accommodation, subsidised for the first six months. However, not all migrants are aware of this initiative and one interviewee indicated that they had great difficulty in renting a house because they did not have a rental track record (as mentioned by I2).

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

In this study, we followed Syed’s (2008) suggested three-level factor analysis, namely micro-, meso- and macro-level factors, regarding effectively using the human capital of skilled migrants. Three key research questions have been developed accordingly, namely ‘*what are the personal experiences of skilled migrants from China and India in their professional job search in South Australia*’, ‘*how do these skilled migrants interpret organisational attitudes towards them*’, and ‘*how do they perceive the role of government institutions towards them*’. By interviewing a number of Chinese and Indian skilled migrants in South Australia, we come to a number of meaningful conclusions.

First, at the micro-level, the majority of our interviewees had a number of negative personal experiences regarding their professional job search in South Australia. The major issues included: lack of accurate information from their initial migration agents regarding the local professional job markets; devaluation of their qualifications and work experience by the accreditation body in Australia; lack of support in securing local work experience before moving into the local professional job market; various barriers related to communication and cultural issues; and lack of local network connections to find professional job opportunities. A minority of our cases had successful experiences; this was mainly due to their local and high qualifications (i.e. Master and PhD degrees) or due to having special technical skills.

Second, at the meso-level of organisational support, our case study shows that many skilled migrants had negative experiences in relation to their current employers or direct line managers. In fact, many of them failed to find a professional job and had to accept unskilled positions in order to make a living. Some of them reported that they were not given a fair chance to grow their career within the organisation. Those who managed to secure a ‘white-

collar' job – albeit below their level – were not positive about any promotional opportunities within the current organisation. Generally speaking, many skilled migrants claimed that their previous work experience in their home countries were not valued by the current employers/managers in South Australia. As for the few successful cases, the migrants were content with their positions and felt they were respected as professionals within a supportive work environment. However, a lack of professional training opportunities was a common problem among these skilled migrants in South Australia.

Third, at the macro-level, the most fundamental problem was the misperception of the professional job market situation in Australia in general and in South Australia in particular. The categorisation of skills used for attracting overseas talents published by the government could be misleading, given the reality of the job market prospects where only a limited number of positions for those skilled migrants are available. Another problem was the lack of support from local government and job agents such as Centrelink services. Even State-sponsored skilled migrants reported that they encountered these problems and barriers. A number of positive comments were related to the support from local vocational colleges, such as TAFE SA, by providing training for new skilled migrants on drafting a cover-letter, writing a CV and preparing for job interviews. In addition, some skilled migrants benefited from a local government's initiative to help skilled migrants in their initial settlement, such as the 'meet and greet' scheme. However, those who were either not aware of this scheme or could not access it, had great difficulty even in renting a house.

### **Implications for theory, policy and practices**

This study takes into account the narratives from skilled migrants from China and India and discusses them on three different levels. Our study is limited in scope and further studies are required to examine and determine which factors influence the effective utilisation of human capital of skilled migrants. Our results show that migrants' expectations and the government's skilled migration programme are not consistent with one another. The feedback from the skilled migrants regarding the transfer process is overall negative and paints a bleak picture for growing and benefitting the talent base in Australia. We considered these issues from a human capital and social capital perspective (Rowley and Ridding, 2012).

Previous studies suggest that a set of horizontal associations between people, consisting of social networks and associated norms, could have a positive effect on

communities, personal productivity and well-being (Armstrong, 2001). Human capital leads to the growth of social capital, and eventually social capital generates the growth of trust, cooperation and innovation, lower transaction costs and increases efficiency and prosperity (Rowley and Redding, 2012). However, our study shows that these positive associations are not yet featured in discussions with skilled migrants. Due to the ineffective management of the skilled migrant programme, valuable overseas talent is not converted into much needed social capital. At the grassroots level, this inefficiency translates into a fragmented and frustrated workforce of skilled migrants with poor local networks and limited career prospects. This has a further negative impact on various norms and levels of trust between the locals and the newly arrived skilled migrants. Without acceptable levels of trust, it will be difficult for both groups to work together effectively to pursue shared objectives (Pulman, 1996).

Regarding the implications for policy and practices, a number of suggestions could be considered by governments and other public organisations. First, it is the government's duty to provide support and opportunities for skilled migrants to obtain a professional job, given that the government initiated the skilled migration schemes. The government should liaise with industry and local HR consultants to ensure that every skilled migrant is placed in a professional job soon after they arrive in Australia.

The professional placement can be salaried or even voluntary, but it is essential that skilled migrants are given an opportunity to prove themselves and familiarise themselves with an Australian work environment in their own profession. By doing so, the required 'local work experience' could be obtained by the skilled migrants for future job applications in Australia.

Second, businesses should be made aware of the benefits of having a multi-cultural workforce. They should be given incentives such as tax reductions or sharing the cost of employing skilled migrants, so that they are encouraged to hire these migrants. While skilled migrants should show their eagerness to join a professional stream by initially offering to volunteer, employers should be willing to invest in providing adequate training to skilled migrants so that their services can be fully utilised. In addition, each Centrelink agent could have at least one local HR consultant trained in providing additional services to skilled migrants and assist them in finding a professional job.



Third, a robust system could be implemented to help skilled migrants gain short-term local employment experience upon arrival. For example, TAFE SA, the ‘Skills for All’ programme (now replaced by “Work Ready” scheme since 2015) and the immigration department could inform ‘Workskil Australia’ about recent skilled migrants. Skilled migrants can make use of Workskil Australia services to approach businesses directly or through various industry organisations for their professional placement. Such placements will provide an opportunity to skilled migrants to demonstrate their abilities and gain local experience.

Fourth, if a skilled migrant is unable to find a relevant professional job over a period of six months despite the best efforts of all the stakeholders, he/she should be allowed to move to other states in order to obtain a professional job, rather than staying in South Australia for the obligatory minimum of two years as per visa rules. Many feel that it is unethical on the part of the South Australian government to invite and grant skilled migrant visas to individuals and then obligate them to hold full-time employment in the state even if the market is unable to support such candidates. This situation essentially forces skilled migrants to take up jobs that are unrelated to their professional category, and if they keep doing that for a considerable period of time, the chances of them finding a professional job elsewhere in Australia after completing their obligatory term in South Australia is severely diminished.

Fifth, the periodical assessments that are carried out by the government to determine the requirements of skilled migrants in each category need to be more in tune with the local job market. The skilled migrants interviewed expressed genuine concerns regarding the accuracy of these projections and indicated that they were out of proportion compared with actual local demands and requirements. The skilled migrants suggested that these projections must be made more carefully and realistically by engaging local stakeholders, i.e. local public and private organisations. Only an up-to-date and accurate depiction of the requirements can assist skilled migrants in making an informed decision of their chances of employability in a given place.

Sixth, most skilled migrants realised that they need to upgrade their qualifications and that their professional careers would be boosted if they attain local qualifications. However, since they are not recognised as local students, they would have to pay the higher international tuition fees (as reported by C2, C6, I2, I5, I9 and I11). This discourages many from taking up courses and further developing their portfolio. Granting local student status to

skilled migrants and family members would benefit both migrants and society at large. Recent data shows that migrants are keen to advance their studies. For example, 30% of recent migrants obtained a college or university qualification, of which 42% obtained a Bachelor degree or higher (ABS, 2013). Finally, we suggest that the assessments by the accreditation bodies in Australia are formally recognised by each representative industry association. Ideally the assessment should carry some professional currency and be respected by the industry members.

In conclusion, this study has examined the barriers and opportunities to effectively use overseas talents through a skilled migration programme. The case studies in South Australia demonstrate that there are success stories but there is room for considerable improvement. We have highlighted and discussed the issues at multiple levels, namely macro-, meso- and micro-levels. The key message is that a skilled migration programme should not only be based on local labour market realities, but should also try to fully utilise skilled migrants as human capital to develop valuable social capital effectively. This could generate opportunities to enrich the workplace and strengthen a multicultural society.

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**TABLE 1: PROFILE OF CHINESE SKILLED MIGRANTS**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Australian Education</b>	<b>Home Country Highest Qualification</b>	<b>Visa Type Upon Arrival</b>	<b>Professional Job in Australia</b>	<b>Category of Professional Job</b>
<b>C1</b>	M	N/A	Bachelor of Arts	Skilled Migrant	No - started own business	N/A
<b>C2</b>	M	N/A	Bachelor in Architecture	Skilled Migrant	No - started own business in related field	N/A
<b>C3</b>	M	Master (IT)	Bachelor (IT)	Spouse Visa	No	N/A
<b>C4</b>	M	N/A	Bachelor (Social Work)	Skilled Migrant	No	N/A
<b>C5</b>	F	Masters in Accounting & Finance	Bachelor in Commerce	Skilled Migrant	Yes (part-time but in same profession)	Low
<b>C6</b>	M	Diploma in Massage	Bachelor in Engineering	Skilled Migrant	No - had to change profession and start own business	N/A
<b>C7</b>	F	N/A	Bachelor	Skilled Migrant	Yes, but much later	Low
<b>C8</b>	F	Bachelor (International Business)	Diploma	Skilled Migrant	No - had to change profession and become sole trader as real estate agent	N/A
<b>C9</b>	F	PhD	Masters	Skilled Migrant	Yes	Top
<b>C10</b>	F	Masters in Arts	Bachelor in Arts	Student Visa	Yes	Middle



**TABLE 2: PROFILE OF INDIAN SKILLED MIGRANTS**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Australian Education</b>	<b>Home Country Highest Qualification</b>	<b>Visa Type Upon Arrival</b>	<b>Professional Job in Australia</b>	<b>Category of Professional Job</b>
<b>I1</b>	F	N/A	Hotel Management + M.A. (English)	Spouse Visa	Yes	Top
<b>I2</b>	M	MBA	B.Sc. (Computer Sc.)	Skilled Migrant	No	Low
<b>I3</b>	M	N/A	Post-graduate Diploma in Business	Spouse of Skilled Migrant	No	Low
<b>I4</b>	M	PhD student	MBA	Skilled Migrant	No	N/A
<b>I5</b>	F	N/A	MBA (Design Management)	Skilled Migrant	No	Low
<b>I6</b>	M	N/A	Diploma in Mechanical Engineering	Skilled Migrant	Yes - Significantly below his level	Upper-Low
<b>I7</b>	M	Masters in Commerce	Bachelor in Commerce & Law	Student Visa	No - Started own business in related field	Upper-Low
<b>I8</b>	M	Diploma	Masters in Commerce	Skilled Migrant	No	Low
<b>I9</b>	F	Unfinished Masters in Education	Masters in Psychology	Spouse of Skilled Migrant	Yes	Upper-Low
<b>I10</b>	M	N/A	MBA	Skilled Migrant	No	Upper-Low
<b>I11</b>	M	CPA	Bachelor Degree	Student Visa	No	Low
<b>I12</b>	F	N/A	Masters in Engineering	Skilled Migrant	Yes	Top
<b>I13</b>	M	N/A	Masters in Engineering	Spouse of Skilled Migrant	Yes	Top
<b>I14</b>	M	Masters in Education	MBA	Skilled Migrant	Yes - Casual	Upper-Low